

Saddam Hussein the Fighter, the Thinker and the Man

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CHAPTER 11

The National Front: A Strategy Objective

The March victory achieved by the July Revolution, in and through which the basis for scientific and principled solutions to the Kurdish problem were established, was not the first of its victories on the road to democracy.

It had achieved another fundamental victory two years earlier with the official establishment, on July 17th, 1973, of the Progressive Patriotic and National Front. It was on that day that President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr declared, through all the Iraqi media, the establishment of the front, after long years of opposition, disagreement and armed conflict, between the Arab Baath Socialist Party and the Iraqi Communist Party. This moment was the crowning glory to long hard efforts, which had more than once fluctuated, until this front was able to see the light.

One might mention here that the Baath Party was the first to extend its hand to the other political forces, including the Iraq Communist Party, in order to unite progressive nationalist political action within the country. This was not after its lone victory in assuming power on the morning of July 17th, but long before, during the dictatorship of Abdul-Kareem Qasim, and even after the tragedies of Mosul and Kirkuk, when it called upon all national and Pan-Arab forces to rally together and form the Patriotic United Front.

When all infiltrators to the July 17th revolution were finally purged, and when the 'plane carrying Abdurrazzaq an-Nayif from the Rasheed military camp to Morocco took off, Saddam Hussein took out the communiqué prepared for the July 30th Revolution. The text of this communiqué, broadcast that day on radio and television, included the following:

" All progressive forces are called upon to be aware of their responsibilities in this delicate stage in the life of our people and our nation, and to make a serious contribution to defending the Revolution and maintaining its progressive path by active participation in bearing the burden of responsibility. In following this route, the Revolution will not take off from positions of weakness, but intends to confirm its belief in the need to have wider mass- participation in pushing the wheels of the revolution forward. (1) "

With these phrases, Saddam Hussein was loyal to the political line decided upon in the Ninth Congress of the Arab Baath Socialist Party held in February 1968, before the Revolution took place. He then asserted clearly and courageously that "struggle by a united front against the negative struggle and the current rule is the only formula capable of meeting the needs of the Arab struggle during this stage, which has been made more complex and significant by Zionist imperialist aggression (2)".

This candid invitation to all forces to participate in the responsibilities of patriotic action was not the last, as it was reiterated more than once by the Baath Party leaders. In December 1968, less than five months after the Revolution, ath-Thawra newspaper published a profound and lengthy study by Tariq Aziz entitled Towards an Established Progressive Patriotic Front. In it he urged the patriotic and progressive forces to make hasty and serious steps to form this front so enthusiastically advocated by the Baath Party. He said: "the patriotic forces must not behave like the logicians of Constantinople,

because "Israel", imperialism, the internal and external reactionary forces, and the sabotage and espionage networks will not wait for the progressives to end their lengthy dialogue, and for an established progressive patriotic front to be formed in Iraq, but will do their utmost to crush these enemies (3)". He concluded his study with a new call: "In all circumstances, and however long the road towards the progressive patriotic front desired, all progressive patriotic groups are asked not to forget a major fact of which the masses are aware. This is that the principal opposition is between all progressive and patriotic groups and Zionist and reactionary colonialism. The existing contradictions, which may arise between the patriotic and progressive groups, are only secondary contradictions, which can be solved. They can never escalate to the level of major contradictions and become a cause of fight and conflict. The new conditions resulting from the changes of July 17th-30th today provide a historic opportunity for putting Iraq on the road to patriotic unity and progressive patriotic revolution. The patriotic groups are responsible for transforming this opportunity into a reality. The cost to the people and to history will be dear should this opportunity, along with the potential to achieve a progressive patriotic revolution on socialist lines, be missed (4)."

On July 20th, 1970, President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr was to hold a press conference in which he confirmed the Baath's attitude to this front, saying: "The Front, in regional and national terms, is a strategic objective established by the Ninth National Congress of The Arab Baath Socialist Party before the July 1968 Revolution. Several moves were made towards the patriotic forces with the aim of establishing the front before the Revolution, but these were met with an irresponsible negativity on their part. When the July 17th Revolution took place, the party renewed its efforts to establish the front, and Proposed that the other forces should share the responsibility, but these unfortunately also adopted a negative stance (5) "

Why were the communists then refusing or proving reluctant to join the front? What were the factors ruling their attitude in this stage just after the Revolution?

It may be said that these factors were essentially the result of the following four factors:

- a) The psychological factor, which permeated the negativism of past relations, and was more subjective than objective as regards the political relations between two vying political forces;
- b) The ideological factor, which prompted a run-through analysis, therefore leading to miscalculation. In the first appraisals of the revolution, this showed that they were merely a link in the chain of coups made by the "petites bourgeois" in the third world and Arab countries.

These quickly lost their enthusiasm, became caught in a maze of problems, and achieved nothing:

- c) The organizational factor: the Iraqi Communist Party was suffering the effects of internal divisions of which no communist movement in any Arab country is free:
- d) The factor of rivalry for the leadership, perhaps the most important of all. The communists first spurned the idea that the Arab Baath Socialist Party had a "distinct" role in leading the front because it had brought about the revolution single-handed. They demanded equal leadership for the different parties within the front, but this was neither practically nor theoretically acceptable, as in relation to front action, there is no such thing as "communicating vessels". In all fronts in both east and west, the party which

brought the revolution to life and holds power always has a leading role, irrespective of whether a front has been established or not.

It is our belief that these four factors constitute the hesitation and indecision of the Iraq Communist Party vis-a-vis the invitation to join the front. The Baath resolutely dealt with these factors, particularly the last.

In a council meeting held in May 1970, Saddam Hussein said, with unequivocal candor: "This revolution is here to stay, and the Arab Socialist Baath Party is to be its leader. This does not mean to say, that when we call upon the patriotic forces to unite, we shall abandon our leading role in the popular and mass organizations, or in the constitutional and executive aspects of rule. We are not only here to rule, but to apply the Arab Baath Socialist Party programme, which in our view, is that of the hardworking masses in Iraq and all other parts of the Arab world. There is a magazine called ath-Thaqafa al-Jadida (The New Culture) which purports to deal with general intellectual issues, but it is, in fact, a political magazine which publishes all Communist Party reports and all points of view. (6)"

The Communist Party, however, continued to demand the principle of "equality", an "equal-sided front", or the application of the "communicating vessels" theory. This was openly done in the Democratic Kurdish Party Congress by Kareem Ahmad ad-Dawud, a member of the Communist Party politburo at the time.

Ath-Thawra newspaper published an article saying that:

"When Abdul-Kareem Ahmad presumed to talk about "an equal-sided front" he was being unrealistic. The meaning of equality comes from the word itself, and not from subjective feelings which some try to impose on others. Equality basically demands equal and joint responsibility and a guarantee of maintaining the results.

For the party wanting equality to be actually equal, its recent history must be one of actual equality, and be commensurate with "consolidating the nature of its Socialist union". It must participate in the revolution against this rule, whatever the losses and gains, and not merely await the benefit and then say it will divide. It must fully acknowledge the revolution which liberated its members and eradicated all previous restraints, instead of meeting it with ingratitude (7)."

The Second Congress of the Iraqi Communist Party, however, held in September, 1970, reiterated the same sentiments about the invitation extended to it to join the front, and insisted upon the principle of equality for all parties.

In July 1970, ath-Thawra published the Baath Party's concept for the establishment of the front, and its conditions and bases. This required all national parties to do the following: to evaluate the Baath Party, being a unique, revolutionary, socialist and democratic party, both candidly and objectively; to make a clear appraisal which does not distort the progressive national revolution of July 17th, which is anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, and against class exploitation; to acknowledge the leading role of the party in the government, in different organizations and in the front; to completely reject the Zionist presence, have utter faith in the total liberation of Palestine and occupied Arab territory, and reject the Security Council resolution by taking up arms to liberate Palestine; to regard Arab unity as the basic aim summing up all other aims; to believe in socialist transformation and oppose colonialism and reaction, and to "allow no loyalties, other than to the revolution, to be created within the armed forces, as these are one of the

important revolutionary institutions, the unity of which as an effective tool is threatened when their ranks are encroached upon by political parties and organizations (8)". On November 15th, 1971, the Arab Baath Socialist Party issued the Patriotic Action Charter "as a culmination to the triumphant revolutionary march and its earnest endeavors to take front action by overcoming the negative attitudes of certain political forces within the country, and by responding to the national interest and the union of the national rank and file in order to further establish the patriotic revolutionary course (9)". The Charter discusses the necessity for a front, the alliance between the progressive patriotic and national forces within Iraq, how the attitude towards this alliance is "principled and strategic", and the number of great achievements made by the revolution under the Baath leadership. These include eliminating the espionage net works within Iraq; the national investment in oil and sculpture; revolutionary legislation in the field of agriculture, for example, Agriculture Reform Law No: 151 of 1970; issuing Labour Law 151 of 1970, and the Pension and Social Security Law; acting to find a just and democratic solution to the Kurdish question; and preparing the widest five-year development plan in the history of the country.

For three months, ath- Thawra opened its pages for all progressive writers of different leanings to discuss the Charter. The consensus was that "The Patriotic Action Charter is a new and significant victory for the revolutionary movement in the country and within the Arab world. It is the first revolutionary move of its kind undertaken by a ruling progressive party in the Arab world (and in most of the Third World) to rally all major progressive forces in its country with a historic invitation to establish and anchor front action and extensive joint struggle, based on practical strategy and revolutionary tactic, to put the Arab revolution on the road to victory(10) ."

The politburo of the Iraq Communist Party, however, issued a communiqué to the effect that the Patriotic Action Charter "has sound bases for patriotic cooperation", and that "the Charter's plan is anti-imperialist in its principle essence and content". It asserted that the Charter declared "complete support for the camp of peoples struggling against imperialism and aggression (11)". And that it "drew up a progressive programme for socio-economic change, and rejects, on principles, development along capitalist lines (12)". It also stated that the Charter confirmed "a firm democratic settlement of the Kurdish issue", and "the importance of continuing to cement cooperation with the socialist states (13)".

Three months passed. In February 1972, Saddam Hussein visited the Soviet Union as head of a large official delegation. This was followed by a visit to Iraq in April, 1972, of Alexei Kosygin, the Soviet Prime Minister, during which a treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed between Iraq and the Soviet Union. During this visit, Kosygin held a meeting with members of the Central Committee of the Iraq Communist Party to exchange viewpoints between "the two sister parties".

The Communist Party then issued a communiqué on the occasion of the treaty signing in which it said:

"The Iraq Communist Party expresses its great welcome of the Iraq-Soviet treaty. It has followed with interest the development of the relationship between Iraq and the Soviet Union, particularly after the visit of the Iraqi party and government delegation to the Soviet Union in February 1972. Today, the efforts of the two friendly sides have culminated in success with the signing of the treaty of friendship and cooperation. The

Iraq Communist Party truly values this positive step, and declares its total willingness to work with all its energy and without restraint to cooperate with the Arab Baath Socialist Party so that the banner of the Iraqi-Soviet friendship remains flying high (14) "

After the Communist Party had declared this stand, the Baath Party Leadership asked it to take up two seats in the cabinet. The Central Committee held an emergency session to discuss the matter, and decided to adopt a positive stand towards it. They therefore agreed to join the Iraqi cabinet, and two members of the Communist Party's Central Committee, Amir Abdullah and Makram al-Talabani subsequently did so. On July 17th, 1973, after a series of meetings between the two sides, it was announced that Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, permanent secretary of the Baath Party regional leadership, and Aziz Muhammad, first secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee had signed a "joint communiqué between the Arab Baath Socialist Party and the Communist Party". Ath-Thawra and al-Fikr al-Jadid published the text of the Patriotic Action Charter and the formulae for front action. The Communist Party made open acknowledgement of the fact that the Arab Baath Socialist Party had a distinctive position in the leadership of the front and its different bodies, and that it had the leading political authority in the state and its constitutional establishments. The text also clearly stipulated a commitment from all parties, other than the leading party of the revolution, to refrain from activity within the armed forces. This was because the latter represents an important revolutionary organization, and any extension into its ranks by political parties and organs constitutes a threat to its unity.

A new page had begun, and in all countries outside Iraq and throughout the Arab world, the progressive nationalist strugglers from all parties and organizations with nationalist and progressive leanings considered this last agreement to be an important achievement of the July Revolution in Iraq. This was because it could have ideological import along the road to positive interaction between the two basic trains of thought in the Arab world, Whereby the different members of the front, through their practical struggles, would become more at one on both intellectual and organizational levels.

In his meetings with the Front Committee, Saddam Hussein himself urged the necessity of this positive interaction, and the need to provide the right ideological and psychological conditions. He said: "I believe the mistake made by the Baathists, and by the Communists in particular, is that each one imagines ideological independence will lead him to think that he alone holds the perfect and absolute key as regards the correct method of application. He then works on this basis, wanting to take all others under his wing, and all his subsequent behavior is influenced by this. If this mistaken understanding of independence persists, the front will not achieve its strategic aims (15)."

Saddam Hussein also made special appraisal of the psychological considerations, which play an important role in creating a suitable framework for this interaction:

"The basis of any interaction is to create the spirit and desire for such. A mere desire with no grounding is not sufficient to create the psychological climate, which makes interaction a required and vital process. Interaction, in any case, is not incompatible with ideological independence. Ideological independence does not invalidate interaction which aims to put the ideology on another course, the new face of which is adjustment to and interaction with the realities of society and the objective conditions which have evolved therein, as well as opening new vistas for political, intellectual and social action.

This method enables us to create a front where there are many possibilities for thought to have discourse with give and take for the future, and with a better and constant interaction (16)."

In his estimation, this positive interaction, the starting point of which is that every party has something to offer and something to learn, may be the "central key" to creating the psychological and intellectual climates, which facilitate the accomplishment of practical objectives.

Without it, "there can be no end to the rigid positions sometimes held by the Baathists. Nor can there be any end to the rigid positions and erroneous conduct amongst the Communists, which, in turn, nurture the Baathists rigid positions and provide them with psychological justifications (17)."

Interaction, however, does not simply mean criticism by the two sides of each other, nor is it merely a demand for rights without positive and practical participation in the building process. This criticism is neither justified, necessary, or legitimate, unless through "an outstanding performance of duty (18)" in daily work. It must also be put on its right course, and not be transformed into a hunt for errors, or transgress the objective possibilities of evaluating the measures taken by the revolution. It must always seek to acquire the "front spirit", and adopt its committees and organizations as a framework, rather than attempt to gain at their expense.

"The Communists, like the Democratic Kurdish Party and others, believe in following an ideological line independent of the Baath Party. They must therefore profit in this way and no other, as any other will inevitably lead to conflict between the different patriotic forces, and may cause deviation when it begins conflicting with the progress of the revolution. If we imagine the picture reversed, with us in the Baath Party condemning the Communists in our speeches and media, just as some of them revile our system, our principles, and us by criticizing the administration for their own gain, what do you think the situation would be? In other words, is it acceptable for our party to gain by crushing others? If so, then you must imagine how much you would lose were the Baath Party leaders, in their speeches to the masses, to speak of the negative aspects of the communist Party. However, when we stop and talk positively about the front, and the role of yourselves and the other national forces, then you will have made an immense gain (19). Saddam Hussein did not hesitate to put the problem of the special state bodies in their natural framework, and to explain why they sometimes exceed the proper bounds.

He also proposed sound and practical solutions for alleviating the pressure they caused: "Throughout the world, in socialist systems and capitalist states, the special bodies may endeavour to face the political leadership with an emergency situation. The untrustworthy elements may do so intentionally, whilst loyal elements may sometimes do so unintentionally, but find themselves psychologically disposed towards creating an abnormal situation in order to assume additional power and increase their weight in dealing with the political leadership.

However, our role in education, supervision, and interaction reduces the opportunities open to the bad or naïve elements for creating an emergency situation to deal with the issues at stake (20)."

But how can this be applied? What is the only way to solve all the problems stemming from the nature of daily work in the practical sense? Saddam Hussein patently states that: "Interaction must increase and meetings be organized. Political decisions and measures

taken by the administration and state must be examined as they are with their basic justifications. The country proverb says incense drives away evil, and we say clarity drives away evil like the candle does darkness."(21)

All this, however, must be based on a fundamental and essential premise without which there is no meaning to interaction or constructive criticism, or to the front itself as such. This premise is one of "belonging to the revolution". Being of the revolution in a clear and defined manner is the necessary preamble, the essential basis, and the solid foundation above, which the process of joint building can rise. The fact alone of sincerely belonging to the revolution can plant the good seeds for every possibility, and perhaps for the need to meet, cooperate and proffer mutual assistance in terms of strategy. Saddam Hussein unambiguously states that this is the "test", and the gauge of success and productiveness in the results for the future:

"There have been many instances throughout the world which demonstrate the high degree of flexibility exercised by the communist parties in response to the patriotic and national conditions in their countries.

Castro's revolution interacted with the Communist Party there to the extent that Castro became its leader. There are communist parties in Eastern Europe, which do not carry this appellation. So why, my communist comrades, do you interpret ideological independence in this country in such a way as to make the possibility of interaction between yourselves and the other political parties remote, whilst interpreting other revolutionary experiments in the world differently? (22)"

It must be said that the principle aim of the front and its strategic vision is not absent from the thoughts of Saddam Hussein, irrespective of the secondary or minor problems some were embroiled in, making them forget the future. However, the question which was repeatedly whispered, sometimes behind closed doors, was put by Saddam Hussein to his colleagues with his usual courage, namely, what have we gained from the front?

"Whether Baathists, Communists, or independents from the other political movements which will later join the front, you will all face the same question, which is, what have you gained from the front? This question will be asked continuously, and is a way of attempting to create and widen psychological gulfs. We may sometimes find that our benefits are small, but if we measure these within the framework of the strategic vision of the future, the bases of which we have made concerted efforts to establish for the sake of our people, then we will find an inestimable daily benefit. Let us reverse the question to the disadvantage of those who ask how we will benefit if we fight amongst ourselves. Their reply will be to ask what the Iraqi people and the nation gained from the previous internecine fighting. . The method we are following involves measuring the gain with calculations and strategic concepts. The revolution, its course, and the front are not to be taken separately, but as a whole. If you take the gain and all it indicates, it will make you and all of us proud to belong to it (23)."

The question, however, apparently continues to be repeated in communist circles, some of which have a syndicalist vision of the gain, or at least view it with an attitude remote from the overall strategic concept of the revolution's progress. What have the Communists lost from joining the front? "Comrades, you are searching for what you have gained, but what have you lost? Your number, your mass support, and the forces of your organization have all increased, and there is scope today for your ideas to interact and

work freely with the other national parties, so what would you gain from not being in the front (24)?"

It is strange that the Communist Party itself should make an open acknowledgement of its gain in the political report made by its first secretary, Aziz Muhammad, in the Third Party Congress held in 1976:

"The progressive achievements which preceded and followed the establishment of the front created greater possibilities for the spread of democracy in the country.

In excellent circumstances, it gave our Communist Party the opportunity to act openly, open its headquarters, and legally publish its daily central newspaper, Tariq ash-Sha'ab (The People's Way). The patriotic Kurdish forces are also able to overtly practice their activities, and the autonomy institutions in Kurdistan have been legitimized (25)."

The first secretary also confirmed the Baath Party leadership of the course, which brought all these accomplishments:

"The Arab Baath Socialist Party is leader of the revolution, the state and the political authority in the country, and has a prominent role in leading the front.

The Communist Party lends its support to this, confirms the revolutionary and progressive achievements which have been made, and regards them as vital, prime, and beneficial goals on the road towards building socialism in Iraq (26)."

By all accounts, principle, organizational, and practical, the Communist Party has therefore "'profited" from the establishment of the front, and from its continuance and progress. So what upset the balance, gave isolationist tendencies the upper hand, and magnified illusions of individualism and separatism? Was something other than the surface activity suggested going on underneath?

After the full assembly of the Communist Party Central Committee in March 1978, a political report sharply criticizing the Arab Baath Socialist Party was widely and openly circulated. It also included new demands incompatible with the wording and spirit of the National Action Charter.

The basic content of the report as regards the front and the relationship between the two parties can be summarized as follows:

1) The Communist Party demanded that 1978 be the end of the transition period, and that preparations be made for general elections to the National Assembly following the general political freedoms granted which allow the masses to use their initiative and powers:

2) The Communist Party demanded to study important resolutions together with the front before they were issued:

3) The Communist Party demanded that the condition of party commitment in assuming responsibilities be withdrawn.

If these were clearly defined demands, then the report paved the way for them with a long chain of criticisms suddenly launched to block any attempt at calm serious discussion, free of any nervous commotion, with the committees and higher leading organizations of the front.

The Baath did not hesitate in making preparations for general elections to the National Assembly. The objective conditions experienced by Iraq in its conflict against the imperialist centres and guards in the north represented in Barazani's rebellion, the decisive victory over them, and the return to normal life in the autonomy region prevented this and the Communist Party " demands " for comprehensive free elections.

Furthermore, the latter's assertions pertaining to general political freedoms and the freeing of energies and initiatives revealed that pressure, suppression and sub dual were being experienced in the country.

This was in contradiction with the report from its previous congress, and was also incompatible with the freedoms of open political exercise and full expression of its opinions in its daily central newspaper which it enjoys, and which no other communist party in the whole area has so far had. In addition, general freedoms which lack direction carry the meaning of "liberalism " which cannot be, nor is it, applied, in the third world and Arab countries, to the conditions peculiar to their social, economic and cultural structure which is linked to the long colonization of their land, and which, even after political independence, remains constantly exposed to the possibility of a new colonialism returning yet again.

Even so, can liberal democracy ever be in concord with the Communist Party ideology? And how can liberalism be established in a society where the economy is strongly controlled from the center by the state?

The other demands perhaps clearly contradict the acknowledgement made by the Communist Party in its previous Congress to the effect that the Baath Party plays a leading and prominent role in the revolution, the state and the front. This very acknowledgement was a basis and condition for the formation of the front itself. The return, here, to the principle of "equality" between the different parties is no more than an attempt to destroy the bases on which the front was established, and upon which the Communist Party agreed from the start, declaring its readiness to cooperate and participate in the building process using these bases as the starting point. Does all this mean anything else than putting a time bomb within the front building itself which will only explode to destroy the entire construction?

The detonator has already been activated with the establishment of communist party cells within the armed forces, an indication that the fire has been ignited.

Notes

- 1) From Communiqué No.27 from The Revolution Command Council on 30-7-1978 on the Flank Movements by The Counter-Forces to The Revolution.
- 2) Tariq, Aziz, op. cit., p. 108.
- 3) Ibid., p. 110.
- 4) Ibid., p. 112.
- 5) Ath- Thawra newspaper, 21-7-1970.
- 6) Ibid., 13-5-1970.
- 7) Ibid., 10-7-1970.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) See Samir Abdul-Kareem, Adhwa' ala al-Haraka ash-Shuyu'iyya fil-Iraq, p. 141.
- 10) Ibid., p. 146.
- 11) From a resolution from The Iraqi Communist Politburo, 27-11- 1971.
- 12) Ibid.
- 13) Ibid.
- 14) From a communiqué issued by The Iraqi Communist Party, 12-4- 1972.
- 15) Saddam Hussein, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
- 16) Ibid., pp. 10-11.

- 17) Ibid., p. 12.
- 18) Ibid., p. 13.
- 19) Ibid., pp. 17-18.
- 20) Ibid., pp. 22-23.
- 21) Ibid., p. 24.
- 22) Ibid., pp. 13-14.
- 23) Saddam Hussein, *Ahadith fil-Qadhaya ar-Rahina*, pp. 132-134.
- 24) Saddam Hussein, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- 25) Documents from The Third Congress of The Iraqi Communist Party, Baghdad, 1976, p. 48.
- 26) From the resolutions of The Third Congress of the Iraqi Communist Party.